

Santa Fe, NM -- Monday, Congressman Harry Teague along with Lt. Governor Diane Denish, and Jayann and David Sepich, the parents of Katie Sepich, announced that he has introduced legislation that would make New Mexico's Katie's Law the national standard for DNA matching and collection.

"Jayann and Dave have experienced something that no parents should ever have to, the loss of a child," said Congressman Harry Teague. "If we have the power through advanced DNA collection to make one less parent grieve for a child, one less husband grieve for a wife, or one less child lose a parent, then that's what we should do. I intend to work in Congress to make sure that we are doing everything we can to improve the system and protect the public by preventing these types of tragedies from happening."

Katie Sepich, a native of Carlsbad, was a 22 year old student at NMSU when she was brutally raped and murdered. DNA under Katie's fingernails helped the police develop a DNA profile for her killer and this profile was included in the national database where all DNA samples are kept. Three years later in 2006, the New Mexico DNA database finally matched the unknown profile to Gabriel Avilla who had been arrested for several other crimes, including a felony burglary in November 2003. Katie's Law was not enacted in New Mexico until January of 2007. If New Mexico had required a DNA sample for Avilla's felony arrest in November 2003, investigators might have solved Katie's murder sooner and caught Avilla before he was able to roam the streets for three years.

Congressman Harry Teague has been working with Katie's parents, Jayann and David Sepich of Carlsbad to develop a national Katie's Law that calls for the Justice Department to work with law enforcement in every state to make sure that they are, at the least, matching certain arrestees to the national DNA bank - the Combined DNA Information System or the CODIS.

Katie's Law will also incentivize those states which not only match arrestees but also contribute to the CODIS in an effort to help save more lives and prevent crime across the country.

Studies have shown that if Katie's Law were to be implemented at the national level it would save the lives of many innocent men and women that could be the victims of violent crime. The Denver District Attorney's Office conducted a study in which they examined the criminal activities of 5 individuals and determined that 47 violent crimes (including 3 murders and 18 sexual assaults) would have been prevented had DNA been collected upon felony arrest.

"Katie's Law simply allows law enforcement to treat DNA evidence left at the scene of a crime as they do fingerprints," said Congressman Harry Teague. "The fact is that the science has advanced and we should allow law enforcement to use all the technology available to them to better identify criminals and keep them from walking the streets."

Congressman Harry Teague introduced the legislation with Congressman Adam Schiff of California.

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